Errors in the Book of Mormon

Evidence and Scholarly Criticism[1]

The Book of Mormon, published in 1830 and regarded by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) as scripture, has been subject to extensive scholarly criticism for various errors, including anachronisms, historical inaccuracies, archaeological inconsistencies, genetic contradictions, internal contradictions, linguistic issues, and textual revisions. These errors are identified by historians, archaeologists, linguists, geneticists, and biblical scholars, who argue that the text reflects 19th-century American culture and theology rather than an ancient record. Below are the main categories of errors, including contradictory evidence from modern scholarship, with citations to sources. Note that LDS apologists often defend the text through alternative interpretations, such as a "limited geography model" for its events or symbolic readings of anachronisms, but mainstream scholars find these unconvincing.

1. Anachronisms

Anachronisms refer to elements in the Book of Mormon that are out of place in the claimed historical context (approximately 2500 BC to 400 AD in the Americas). Critics argue these reflect Joseph Smith's 19th-century environment rather than ancient American reality.

Animals: The text mentions horses (1 Nephi 18:25; Alma 18:9–10; Ether 9:19), elephants (Ether 9:19), cattle/cows (Enos 1:21; Ether 9:18), goats (1 Nephi 18:25; Ether 9:18), and swine (Ether 9:18) as domesticated or wild animals used for food, transportation, or labor. Contradictory evidence: Archaeological and paleontological records show horses were extinct in the Americas by around 10,000 BC and reintroduced by Europeans in the 16th century; elephants (mastodons/mammoths) were extinct by the end of the Pleistocene (ca. 10,000 BC); Old World cattle, goats, and swine were absent in pre-Columbian Americas, introduced post-1492. No evidence of domestication or use exists in Mesoamerican or Andean sites.

Plants: Barley (Mosiah 9:9; Ether 9:17) and wheat (Mosiah 9:9) are described as cultivated crops. Contradictory evidence: These domesticated grains were introduced to the Americas by Europeans; pre-Columbian agriculture focused on maize, beans, and squash, with no evidence of Old World cereals in archaeological pollen or macrofossil records.

Technology and Materials: Steel swords (1 Nephi 4:9; Ether 7:9), iron (2 Nephi 5:15; Jarom 1:8), chariots (Alma 18:9–10; 20:6), a compass (1 Nephi 18:12, described as the "Liahona"), and windows (Ether 2:23) are mentioned. Contradictory evidence: Pre-Columbian metallurgy in the Americas was limited to copper and gold; iron and steel production began post-1492. Wheeled vehicles like chariots are absent from archaeological

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records due to terrain, lack of draft animals, and no wheel artifacts. The compass was invented in China around 1100 AD. No evidence of such technologies exists in Mesoamerican or Andean sites.

Other Anachronisms: The text quotes Isaiah chapters 48–54 (2 Nephi 7–8), but these were likely written during the Babylonian captivity (586–538 BC), after Lehi's departure (ca. 600 BC). Baptism is depicted as a pre-Christian practice (Mosiah 18:12–17; 2 Nephi 31), but proselyte baptism emerged in Judaism around the 1st century BC–1st century AD. Contradictory evidence: Biblical scholarship dates Deutero-Isaiah to the exile period, and baptism as a ritual is not attested in pre-exilic Judaism.

Scholars like Michael Coe (Yale University) argue these anachronisms indicate a 19th-century composition, as they reflect Joseph Smith's contemporary knowledge rather than ancient American reality.

2. Archaeological Inconsistencies

The Book of Mormon describes large-scale civilizations with cities, temples, roads, metallurgy, armies, and battles involving millions (*e.g.*, Ether 15:2, claiming two million Jaredite deaths; Mormon 6:9–15, describing hundreds of thousands of Nephite deaths).

Contradictory Evidence: No archaeological sites in the Americas match the Book of Mormon's descriptions of Nephite or Lamanite civilizations. Mesoamerican cultures (*e.g.*, Maya, Olmec) show no evidence of Hebrew/Egyptian scripts, monotheistic worship, or Book of Mormon-specific artifacts like steel swords or chariots. Large battle sites (*e.g.*, Cumorah, where millions allegedly died) lack mass graves, weapons, or fortifications. Population estimates are unrealistic: Lehi's small group (ca. 30 people) could not grow to millions within centuries, as described.

Scholars like Michael Coe and John Clark (BYU, but critical of historicity claims) note that despite extensive excavations in proposed Book of Mormon locations (*e.g.*, Mesoamerica), no corroborating evidence exists, contrasting with biblical archaeology (*e.g.*, Jericho walls, Dead Sea Scrolls).

3. Genetic Contradictions

The Book of Mormon claims that Native Americans are descendants of Israelite migrants (Lehites from Manasseh, Mulekites from Judah), with Lamanites as their "principal ancestors" (original 1981 introduction).

Contradictory Evidence: Mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) and Y-chromosome studies show Native Americans descend from Asian populations via Beringia migrations (ca. 15,000–20,000 years ago), with haplogroups A, B, C, D, and X linked to Siberia/Central Asia, not the Middle East. No Cohen Modal Haplotype (Jewish priestly marker) or other Semitic

DNA is present in pre-Columbian Native Americans. Haplogroup X is Eurasian, not Israelite-specific.

Geneticists like Simon Southerton argue this absence contradicts the Book of Mormon's claims, even under a limited geography model, as no Israelite DNA appears in Mesoamerican populations.

4. Internal Contradictions and Textual Issues

The Book of Mormon contains inconsistencies in timelines, numbers, and theology, as well as extensive quotes from the King James Bible (KJV), including translation errors.

Examples: Over 2,000 verses quote the New Testament verbatim, written centuries later (*e.g.*, 3 Nephi 12–14 mirrors Matthew 5–7). The text has nearly 4,000 revisions since 1830, including grammatical fixes and doctrinal changes (*e.g.*, "white and delightsome" to "pure and delightsome" in 2 Nephi 30:6, 1981 edition).

Contradictory Evidence: The KJV, published in 1611, includes unique errors (*e.g.*, italics for supplied words) replicated in the Book of Mormon. Internal contradictions include God's nature (Alma 18:24–28 describes a single God, while early editions had Trinitarian views later altered). Scholars like Fawn Brodie note parallels with 19th-century sources like Ethan Smith's View of the Hebrews (1823), suggesting plagiarism.

5. Linguistic and Scriptural Errors

The Book of Mormon is written in 17th-century English mimicking KJV style, with no original manuscript evidence of "reformed Egyptian" (Mormon 9:32).

Contradictory Evidence: No pre-Columbian Semitic or Egyptian scripts exist in the Americas; Mesoamerican writing (*e.g.*, Maya glyphs) is unrelated. Linguistic analysis shows the text's vocabulary and syntax align with 19th-century American English, not ancient languages.